

ABSTRACT

The Academic, Personal and Social Barriers Faced by Low-Income Single Mothers Enrolled in Institutions of Higher Education, and Their Impact on Academic Persistence.

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This study explores the experiences of single female college students who are financially disadvantaged and raising children, while pursuing their education. In order fully understand the challenges and barriers faced by these women, it is important to realize their motivation to pursue an education, in spite of these challenges. Because of the importance for single mothers to attain financial independence and self-sufficiency, higher education is a central concept of this study.

The literature of the following disciplines were analyzed: (1) the demographics and profiles of the financially disadvantaged single mother college student, (2) the characteristics and history of adults returning to college, (3) the history of welfare reform, and (4) the sociological research on women's issues as related to higher education.

Although American society has a long tradition regarding education as a means to achieve material security and social status, access to higher education has been extended to certain disadvantaged and deserving groups, such as minorities and war veterans, to enable them to improve the quality of their lives. Unfortunately, this opportunity has not been readily extended to welfare

recipients. The potential of higher education as a means by which financially disadvantaged women could achieve independence and become productive members of society will be addressed in this study, with the primary focus on academic retention.

The subjects were comprised of 45 low-income single mothers, between the ages of 24 and 40, with at least one dependent child, who are enrolled in an institution of higher education in Northern New Jersey. The study looked at a multitude of social and academic variables that enhanced or interfered with the educational persistence of these women.

For the quantitative portion of the study, four hypotheses were tested to ascertain the level to which social and academic support impacted educational persistence. For the qualitative portion of the study, ten interviews were conducted, enabling the researcher to understand the factors that influence educational persistence.

The findings from the surveys and interviews indicate that regardless of levels of academic and social support or interference, these women were determined to remain enrolled to attain economic self-sufficiency.